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The Power of Storytelling

As Information Management/Information Technology (IM/IT) professionals, we each have the responsibility to be champions of change, and set the example for our peers. Embracing change is essential to the Navy-Marine Corps transformation to a network-centric force, and central to the theme of achieving Knowledge Dominance. The Navy-Marine Corps team has

long been recognized as a Federal leader in Knowledge Management (KM). Throughout the Department there are numerous examples of the power of collaborative tools, information sharing and communities of practice. Commands are recognizing the power of creating an organizational culture that understands its knowledge requirements, effectively leverages its intellectual capital, and values and rewards the flow of knowledge and learning. It's a natural fit for us. While the discipline of KM has evolved to provide processes, tools and practices that can help organizations emulate and formalize knowledge capture and creative problem solving; these virtues have long been evident in the behavior of every successful Sailor, Marine, or civilian member of our team. The Sailor on deployment who finds a way to improvise when a pump breaks and there is no replacement part on the ship; the long tradition of "sea stories" where creative solutions to atypical management or operational problems get shared with interested parties; the long heralded power of Navy Chiefs and Marine Gunnery Sergeants to reach out to an extensive network of professionals to achieve the impossible; are all examples of the kind of creative, self-adaptive learning and collaboration that KM tools and practices can facilitate in organizations.

At Submarine Group TEN in Kings Bay, Ga., teams are applying KM principles in an innovative Warrior Knowledge pilot designed to reengineer the "off-crew," pre-deployment training process for Sailors. The team is looking for new technologies and resources to improve the efficiency and the richness of the training experience. New opportunities are being discovered to share information across communities of practice and embrace innovations like video capture to record just-in-time maintenance training. In addition, the Trident Refit Facility, not previously involved in crew training, may offer use of its facilities to provide Sailors real hands-on maintenance and repair events to greatly enhance training and maintain proficiency levels. The Commander Naval Reserve Force (CNRF) has recently embarked on an effort to transform the Naval Reserve into a high performance, "Knowledge-Centric Reserve Force," where knowledge is readily shared and available to all who need it to support the mission of the organization. This goal was established as part of the CNRF Leading Change initiative to maximize the intellectual capital of the Reserve Force, and it is already yielding positive results. It will include improved technology, strategic planning, and business process reengineering.

A common thread that runs through these and other ongoing KM efforts is the importance of storytelling. Each of us, as IM/IT professionals, must step up and take a leadership role in helping to "tell the story" of our transformational efforts. Whether it is to increase operational effectiveness, improve quality of life, reduce overhead costs, reduce cycle times, or create innovative and learning environments, our ongoing efforts, like knowledge management, eGovernment and the Navy Marine Corps Intranet, are important stories that must be told and understood. In his book, *Leading Minds*, Howard Gardner describes a leader as someone who significantly affects the thoughts, feelings, and/or behaviors of a significant number of individuals. He goes on to point out that one of the key tenets of a good leader is to be a good storyteller — one who can fashion stories of identity, and then embody that story in his or her life. The leader, as a storyteller, must also successfully wrestle with the stories that are already operative in the minds of the audience, or the counter-stories that will resonate in the minds of unconvinced listeners.

As we move forward on this transformational journey, new ideas and technologies will emerge and we will be the beneficiaries of tremendous opportunities to reshape the Department of the Navy. These opportunities will be realized if we can leverage the power of storytelling to do two things: (1) Create an organizational culture that embraces the flow of knowledge and, (2) Communicate the value proposition of our change initiatives, rather than focusing on the "pain of change." Let's face it, transitions are hard. In *Managing Transitions*, William Bridges points out the inherent conundrum of a transition. In essence, before you can begin something new, you have to end what currently exists. So beginnings depend on endings, and the problem is, people often don't like endings. We are working on a lot of "new beginnings" across the Navy and Marine Corps, and I encourage each of you to help be a champion for this journey of transformation.

"Putting Information to Work for Our People."